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ABSTRACT

Counselor educators at The University of Tennessee implemented a competency-based counseling practicum in 1974. These educators have had several reactions to this approach. The counselor competencies that are employed are listed at the conclusion of the paper. It has been noted that the competencies tend to encourage movement through the counseling process. They also facilitate the practice of counseling skills because they are specifically stated. Vaguely stated skills can not be practiced. Most of the competencies are stated in such a way so as to require repeated demonstrations on the part of the student counselors. It is typically with the second or third demonstration that the student is able to fit the skill naturally into his or her counseling style. The competencies have also facilitated communication between supervisors and students. Competency statements provide a written basis of expectation between them. The competency-based approach has been shown to have limitations, however. An example is cited in which a counseling student was able to adequately demonstrate all the competencies, but yet did not perform well in an actual counseling situation. He felt uncomfortable with secondary school students and tended to avoid personal contacts with them. The competencies seem to be a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for good counseling. (Author)

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A SUPERVISOR'S REACTIONS TO A COMPETENCY-BASED COUNSELING PRACTICUM

By

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The idea of competency-based counselor education has been proposed and discussed for several years. Those counselor education departments that decided to implement the procedure have now had some experience with it. These experiences are worth sharing with those who are still contemplating the issue.

The Educational Psychology and Guidance Department at The University of Tennessee started developing a competency-based program two years ago. Portions of that program were implemented one year ago. One of those portions deals with the counseling practicum. This paper focuses on practicum supervisors' reactions to working with practicum competencies. The following comments are based on the experiences of supervising masters degree counseling students who had their practicums in a variety of settings (middle school, high school, community college, psychiatric hospital, etc.).

Competencies encourage movement through the counseling process

The counseling competencies (Note 1) are listed in the order in which counselors typically employ the skills in the counseling process. For example, skills which aid the establishment of a relationship come first, and skills that are used in the evaluation of counseling and termination come later. This ordering of skills is a constant reminder to the student that counseling is basically an active process and not a static discussion.

The ordered list of competencies also teaches the concept that each step in the counseling process is closely related to other steps that come before and after it. When the practicum student is in the process of establishing a goal for counseling, it is logical to consider the previous analysis of the problem. Would the accomplishment of the goal really help to alleviate the problem? A goal statement also typically suggests the form of a strategy to follow. In the case of an individual whose goal is to be more assertive, the strategy of role playing often provides an opportunity to try out some new behaviors in safe surroundings.

Competencies can be practiced

Competencies that are clearly stated in terms of counselor behaviors make the courses which precede practicum (e.g., counseling theories, pre-practicum, etc.) more efficient and meaningful. Counselor behaviors that are precisely described can be discussed, mentally practiced, and role played. By the time the student attempts to demonstrate the competency in practicum, he or she can have already experienced it in a low anxiety producing situation such as pre-practicum.

Counselor behaviors that are not clearly described obviously cannot be practiced. If counselor behaviors are vaguely stated, the practicum student is in the situation of having to attempt what he or she "thinks" is being required. Then they must wait for feedback from the supervisor. A competency statement such as "Develop a warm and accepting relationship" is difficult to practice and must be done in a real counseling situation. "Identify at least three client areas of concern in the first two interviews" is a skill that can be practiced through a role playing exercise.

Competencies facilitate practice

Most of the competency statements in The University of Tennessee program are stated in such a way as to require repeated demonstrations of the skill. The stu-

dent counselor, for example, is required to identify client behaviors that are contributing to the problem in three different cases. It has been found that initially students focus excessively on the competency. With the second and third demonstrations, however, the student learns to feel more at ease with the competency and as a result focuses on the client. Most counselors would agree that in order to be truly effective with any technique, the counselor must be totally familiar with the procedures to be used so that he or she can "forget" them and focus on the client's process is facilitated by the required repetitions.

In those instances where counseling students have gone beyond the initial demonstration of each competency, it has been interesting to note the focus of the supervisory sessions. The focus tends to be less and less directed at the competencies specifically. Supervisory sessions cover many varied topics such as alternative counseling strategies, counselor and client dynamic patterns, and evaluation of counseling success. The more familiar counseling students become with the competencies the more freedom and flexibility is introduced into the counseling process. Students who resist the competencies, and are, therefore, less familiar with them, tend to experience them as very constraining and limiting.

Competencies facilitate communication

Communication between the student counselor and the supervisor is aided by the competency statements. In the supervisory relationship, the intended evaluation criterion is clearly stated. The competency statements provide the student with a picture of the supervisor's expectations.

Competencies do not cover all components of good counseling

An example best illustrates the problem in which competency statements do not describe all the components of good counseling. The situation involved a student who had taken all the content oriented courses for a master's degree in counseling. He had saved the required two terms of counseling practicum for the last experience. There was little reason to suspect that upon entering practicum he would have difficulty.

In the actual practicum experience, he performed adequately relative to demonstrating the required skills. It turned out, however, that he had a real dislike for being involved in the counseling process. This reaction seemed to be most clearly illustrated by his uncomfortable feelings around secondary school students. He consistently avoided points of student congregation. Once into the practicum experience, he was able to understand clearly his feelings and the reasons for his actions. Practicum supervisors suggested that he look for employment that would not involve active counseling. He was in general agreement with this suggestion.

The above case demonstrates the situation in which someone may easily demonstrate all the competencies, but still be weak relative to some of the more intangible characteristics expected in good counselors.

Summary

Practicum supervisors have had several reactions to the implementation of a competency-based counseling practicum. The competencies encourage movement through

the counseling process. They also facilitate the practice of counseling skills and communication between supervisor and student. It has also been observed that they do not account for all the necessary minimum characteristics of a counselor.

PRACTICUM REQUIREMENTS

A. Demonstrates an articulation of and support for a personal theory of counseling.

1. Produces an audio or video tape of one of his/her counseling sessions which demonstrates a particular counseling theory.	Date completed_____ Evaluated by_____

B. Demonstrates the ability to maintain a helpful counseling relationship.

1. Maintains counseling relationship with at least two clients for at least four sessions each. (1 2)	Date completed_____ Evaluated by_____
2. Writes minimally helpful responses on a stimulus-situation test regarding empathy, respect, and warmth.	Date completed_____ Evaluated by_____
3. Responds at minimally helpful levels regarding empathy, respect, and warmth during at least 5 counseling sessions. (1 2 3 4 5)	Date completed_____ Evaluated by_____
4. Receives a positive client evaluation on sixteen of the seventeen items on the Counselor Relationship Form from at least half of the clients seen.	Date completed_____ Evaluated by_____
5. Receives a positive response to item 17 on the Counselor Relationship Form from at least half of the clients.	Date completed_____ Evaluated by_____

C. Demonstrates the ability to explore and identify the problems.

1. Makes counseling tapes which contain at least five interpretive or clarification statements which are verified by the client. (1 2 3 4 5)	Date completed_____ Evaluated by_____
2. Verbalizes the client's expectations of counseling to the client which are verified by the client in at least three counseling interviews. (1 2 3)	Date completed_____ Evaluated by_____
3. Receives positive verbal verification of the counselor's statement regarding client's feelings about the problem in at least three counseling interviews. (1 2 3)	Date completed_____ Evaluated by_____
4. Has at least three clients make a concise statement regarding his/her problem on tape. (1 2 3)	Date completed_____ Evaluated by_____

5.	Communicates counselor's accurate perception of the client's problem to the evaluator in at least three interviews. (1 2 3)	Date completed_____ Evaluated by _____
6.	Has a statement by the client, on tape, regarding his/her behaviors that are contributing to the problem.	Date completed_____ Evaluated by_____
7.	Has a statement by the client demonstrating his/her awareness of the consequences of his/her present behaviors.	Date completed_____ Evaluated by_____
8.	Has at least three clients describe on tape what he/she has done and what he/she is doing about the problem. (1 2 3)	Date completed_____ Evaluated by_____

D. Demonstrates the skill of helping an individual through the stages of problem solving.

1.	Establishes a mutually agreed-upon goal for counseling with three clients on tape. (1 2 3)	Date completed_____ Evaluated by_____
2.	Explains to the evaluator the rational and theoretical framework for a counseling strategy used with at least three clients in problem solving. (1 2 3)	Date completed_____ Evaluated by_____
3.	Implements a counseling strategy with at least three clients. (1 2 3)	Date completed_____ Evaluated by_____

E. Demonstrates that the outcome of the counseling process is satisfactory in terms of a helpful relationship and resolution of the client's concerns.

1.	Identifies behaviors which indicate at least two clients followed through on the plan of action developed by the clients and the counselor on a tape recording of a counseling interview. (1 2)	Date completed_____ Evaluated by_____
2.	Receives verbal verification of the fulfillment of at least two clients' needs through behaviors and attitudes identified by the client. (1 2)	Date completed_____ Evaluated by_____
3.	Receives a verbal or written positive report of the clients behavioral or attitudinal modification from a client's teacher, supervisor, parent or peer.	Date completed_____ Evaluated by_____
4.	Identifies on a tape recording examples of the client's ability to apply the principles learned in the counseling relationship to other areas of his/her behavior by speaking about other concerns and stating the relationship to the learned behaviors.	Date completed_____ Evaluated by_____